

CONSUMER INFORMATION FROM USDA

Food Safety and Inspection Service, *Food Safety & Consumer Education Office*

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Summer Food Handling

In the summertime, foods can quickly reach the "Danger Zone" (the temperatures between 40° F and 140° F where bacteria multiply rapidly), so it's more important than ever to be sure foods are handled properly.

The refrigerator should be maintaining 40° F or slightly lower and the freezer should be set for zero degrees. They may need to be put on a lower temperature setting in the summertime.

Selecting Foods

When shopping for raw and cooked foods in the summertime, be sure the store is displaying food at the proper temperature. Display cases may have to be put on a colder setting to compensate for summertime temperatures. Never choose packages which are torn or leaking.

Cross Contamination

Put raw meat and poultry into a plastic bag so meat juices won't cross contaminate cooked foods or those eaten raw, such as vegetables or fruit.

When ordering food from the deli department, be sure the clerk observes good sanitary practices. Don't buy cooked items touching raw items in the display case.

Taking Food Home

Put refrigerated or frozen items in the shopping cart immediately before heading for the checkout counter.

Ask the bagger to put raw foods in bags separate from cooked foods and produce. When loading the car, keep perishable items inside the air conditioned car -- not in the trunk.

Drive immediately home from the grocery. If you live farther away than 30 minutes, bring a cooler with ice from home and place perishables in it.

Storage of Foods

Unload perishable foods from the car first and immediately refrigerate or freeze them. Assuming the store wrap on meat and poultry is clean and not torn, it's best to leave a product in its original packaging to keep from introducing bacteria.

For long-term freezer storage (longer than 2 to 3 months), overwrap store packaging with clean plastic or aluminum foil for added protection from freezer burn.

Wash hands before and after handling raw meat and poultry.

Handle perishable food quickly and get it into the oven or the refrigerator as soon as possible. When refrigerating or freezing, don't stack foods -- the cold air needs to reach the center to chill them fast.

Call Toll-free For More Information:

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline
1(800) 535-4555
Washington DC (202) 720-3333

Preparation

Be sure all work surfaces and utensils are clean before preparing food. Remember, bacteria can be present on any surface or food as well as on people's hands. To sanitize cutting boards, counters and sinks, first wash with hot, soapy water. Make a solution of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach to a quart of water and let the solution set on surfaces for a few minutes. Then rinse with clear water and pat dry.

Marinate meat and poultry in a covered dish in the refrigerator unless cooking them within the hour. Never partially cook food to finish later.

When picnicking or cooking outdoors, take plenty of clean utensils. Never put cooked food on a platter which contained raw meat or poultry. Pack clean, soapy sponges, cloths and wet towelettes for cleaning surfaces and hands.

Thorough Cooking

Cook ground meats to 160° F; or until brown in the middle with no pink juices. Beef, veal and lamb steaks, roasts and chops may be cooked to 145° F. All cuts of pork to 160° F. Whole poultry and thighs should reach 180° F; breasts, 170° F. Juices should be clear; meat, not pink.

Keep hot food hot!

Leftovers

Divide foods into small shallow containers to help foods cool quicker. Put food directly in the refrigerator or freezer. Never refrigerate one large pot of food or a whole turkey.